

2008 Colorado River Corridor/Blythe Conservation Project

Off-Highway Vehicle use along the Colorado River Corridor is having dramatic effects upon designated wilderness areas. By Congressional definition, wilderness is an “area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man”. As such, Congressional statute closes all wilderness areas to motorized equipment. Ten wilderness areas are within the jurisdiction of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Palm Springs-South Coast Field Office (PSSC FO), covering 588,904 acres. The wilderness areas of eastern Riverside County are vast and contain some of the most outstanding plant and animal representations of the Colorado Sonoran Desert.

The PSSC FO administers the Riverside Mountains Wilderness Area located in Riverside County, approximately 25 miles north of Blythe along US Highway 95. This 25,300 acre wilderness area lies within the Colorado Sonoran desert. The dominant feature of the wilderness is the rugged Riverside mountain range. The Colorado River and Highway 95 border the range on the east, with a system of washes and Northern & Eastern Colorado Desert Coordinated Management Plan (NECO) 2002 designated routes to the south. This arid mountain range rises 1,500 feet above the Colorado River Valley. Portions of these mountains exhibit an almost "moonscape" look composed of mostly granite, with little perennial vegetation growth on the slopes. The lower elevations within wilderness are composed of many braided stream channels and dry washes. The larger washes contain a great variety of desert woodland species including palo verde and ironwood.

The popularity of the Colorado River has increased the presence of OHV users, and as a result, intense surface damage is occurring within the Riverside Wilderness. Located upon the foothills of the Riverside Mountains Wilderness are large flat areas of ancient Colorado River Terraces. It is on this nearly barren and highly fragile desert pavement that the Native Americans practiced their art skills and developed many intaglio figures of animals, humans, plants and other symbols. While these areas appear to be ideal locations in which to enjoy ATV riding, the protection of these unique landscapes is vital. Illegal OHV activity within wilderness has created the most extensive surface impacts, including dislodging of desert pavement, disruption of soil development, and the creation of numerous illegal trails through dry washes. The full extent of impacts to these sites is unknown.

Size and Description of Project:

Approximately three miles of fencing and barriers are required adjacent to the Riverside Mountains Wilderness in order to delineate between wilderness areas and authorized routes of travel as designated by the NECO Plan. Heavy equipment and a small crew will establish physical barriers to discourage illegal OHV activity and redefine routes of travel. The development and placement of interpretive and regulatory signs will inform the public of the importance of wilderness protection. Law enforcement patrol and resource monitoring of these

sites will encourage OHV compliance.

The Colorado River Working Group proposed this OHV conservation project, as a cooperative effort between Palm Springs FO (as lead) and Yuma FO, with involvement of other agencies such as the Bureau of Reclamation and the Palo Verde Irrigation District. The Colorado River Working Group was developed following the Winter 2006 Grant Hearings, and involves partnership projects between five BLM offices, three which manage California Desert District Areas, (Needles, Palm Springs, El Centro) and two Arizona offices which manage California lands on the western side of the Colorado River (Yuma FO, and the Lake Havasu District Office).

How the project will sustain OHV Recreation or OHV Opportunities:

This project will clearly delineate the boundary of wilderness and designated routes travel, which parallel the wilderness boundary. The project will not affect routes open and designated for OHV use. Signing and physical barriers will increase OHV compliance. By improving OHV compliance, this project will protect soil stability and desert pavement surfaces and preserve both cultural sites and wilderness for the enjoyment of future generations. Protecting natural resources will reduce user conflict and sustain legal OHV opportunities in the local area.

The fence will receive monitoring for overall effectiveness using GIS-based data collection and photo-point methods established by a workgroup of BLM staff from the California Desert District and the State Office in September 2004. Success criteria implemented will measure site improvement to natural conditions and increased OHV compliance as determined by a reduction in OHV trespass and site damage. BLM sustains site integrity through routine maintenance, staff monitoring, and law enforcement patrols. This grant will fund short-term monitoring and repairs of restored sites; permanent BLM staff will provide long-term site care.

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Anticipated Timeline

Time	Description
June 2008	Begin hiring personnel to prioritize sites and strategies.
August 2008	Begin surveying sites for sensitive resources and preparing site specific environmental documentation.
March 2009	Hire contractors and purchase equipment. Begin installing barriers. Restore line-of-site areas.
December 2009	Short-term monitoring and maintenance complete

BLM will inform the OHMVR of miscellaneous expenses in the Project-Cost Deliverables at the time of purchase.